

# Kansas

LEBANON



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# &

# Tobacco



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*Chapter in America's Industrial Growth*

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y good tobacco was  
e, a source of income  
for settlers. Today, Kansas is an important market  
for tobacco products. It has many thousand retailers  
who dispose of millions of dollars worth of goods.  
In turn, this merchandising provides employment  
for numerous people and brings fiscal benefits to  
the state.*

*Tobacco History Series*

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# Kansas and Tobacco



Among the early settlers in Kansas territory were a large number of emigrant Germans who, when they could not get cigars, smoked pipes; Frenchmen and Flemings accustomed to snuff, and Americans from the East and South who were tobacco chewers. They did what log-cabin pioneers usually did on new lands: planted tobacco along with staple food crops. Pioneering was hard work—and tobacco brought relaxation and a degree of comfort.

These settlers grew tobacco in patches on their farms chiefly from seeds of Burley cultivated in nearby states. The native type long used by the Kansa Indians—a small, shrubby *Nicotiana*—was too harsh for the palates of men accustomed to better leaf. This aboriginal type, which was indigenous to the eastern part of the country as

well, had always been rejected by European colonists. What took its place were varieties of the tobacco derived from Spanish-American colonies, experimentally planted in Virginia around 1612.

## **T**he income of Kansas is supplemented by tobacco

The extension of settlements in Kansas increased crops of tobacco beyond the personal needs of farmers. For a while this agriculture seemed commercially promising. It never went very far, however, and tobacco production in Kansas is now negligible.

But Kansans today do not lack tobacco in manufactured forms. In 1969, for instance, smokers in the state bought about five billion cigarettes. These were supplied to them through 17,610 retail outlets including vending machines and other sources.

Sales of cigarettes in Kansas returned about \$18.8 million gross in state tax revenue in fiscal 1969. The estimated wholesale value of cigarettes came to more than \$63.1 million; that of other tobacco products to over \$11 million.

## **T**obacco's place in the national economy

Tobacco users in Kansas, together with more than 50 million other Americans, thus share in one of our country's major industries.

The business of tobacco in the United States is extensive.

In 1969, for instance, some 3 million farmers and their helpers worked more than a half million tobacco farms. They produced in the range of 1 billion 800 million pounds of fine leaf. For this, American and foreign buyers paid them over \$1.4 billion.

Almost every industrial section and many non-tobacco farming communities participate in some phase of the tobacco business. A considerable labor force is required to auction off tobacco, to process and transport it, to manufacture and distribute it. From the fields and orchards, the factories and plants in over half the states of the Union there is a steady flow of materials, machinery and equipment to manufacturers of tobacco located in some 25 states.

The chief part of the tobacco harvested each year in 22 states is converted into large quantities of tobacco goods. In 1969 these totaled almost 558 billion cigarettes, over 8 billion cigars and cigarillos, over 64 million pounds of smoking tobacco, some 70 million pounds of chewing tobacco and more than 28 million pounds of snuff. Over 1.5 million retail outlets meet the consumer demand of Americans for these tobacco products.

The preparation of cigarettes alone requires millions of dollars in additional material. Cigarette manufacturers, in 1968, used 40 million pounds of cellophane, 70 million pounds of aluminum foil, 27 billion printed packs, 2.7 billion cartons, and employed over 1.5 million

businesses for supply, transportation, advertising, distribution and other necessary functions.

The tobacco industry is the oldest commercial enterprise in our country with an unbroken continuity dating from around 1613. Its use of a large labor force, its dependence upon the supplies and services of numerous industries, its interstate operations, all give it a place of major importance in the national economy.

Any segment of the national tobacco market, such as Kansas, represents more than merely another retail outlet. Essential to the disposition of tobacco goods are wholesalers and distributors, vending machine suppliers, transportation services, media advertising — and other workers in the state required to maintain the flow of goods and provide services.

## **P**roduction in Kansas has an early start

A year after Kansas became a state in 1861, tobacco was being grown as a cash crop. The first official statistical reports of the agricultural products of Kansas are incomplete. The tobacco harvest of 1862 was listed as 14,618 pounds. Fifteen years later tobacco crops totaled 530,839 pounds, worth \$53,083 to growers.

Settlers were being invited to the new state where, said its promoters, everything could be grown. This enthusiasm found expression in such published comments as, "You have but to tickle the soil of Kansas to make it laugh a harvest."

New settlers did come in, chiefly from the South. Together with the farmers already established they converted virgin soil to fruitful lands. Among the harvests was practically a bumper crop of tobacco in 1883. In that year 778,400 pounds were produced for the market. Everyone was encouraged to go on. True, the work was hard but there were compensations. And, as a contemporary writer remarked:

*life here is toned up to healthful tension . . .  
One feels like business in this rare, radiant atmosphere. Nothing drags here. Everybody feels fresh, and youthful, and self-commanding. Nothing denotes age but the rocks and the hills.*

## **T**obacco farmers try again

The cultivation of tobacco for cash crops would have been extended had there been practical encouragement to continue the industry. But the price of Kansas tobacco in primary markets began to decline. It had been 10 cents a pound in the 1880's; 8 cents the pound in the 1890's and was down to less later. Before the end of the century, production was confined to 80 acres.

Early in the 1900's an effort was made to revive interest in tobacco-growing among farmers in southern Kansas, around Coffeyville. A local merchant, Colonel Sharp, formerly of Kentucky, was convinced that Kansas-grown tobacco would bring better prices than it had if





*Looking toward the Missouri River  
on Delaware Street, Leavenworth, in 1867*



farmers concentrated on the "right type." He took a practical step to prove his point. Around 1909 he imported seeds of the Burley variety from Kentucky. These were distributed among all farmers in the area willing to accept them—about a hundred in all—and Colonel Sharp offered a \$10 prize for the best example grown from the Kentucky seed. The resultant crops convinced him and his farmer friends that fine Burley could be as successfully grown in Kansas as in Kentucky.

Once again hard-working men were willing to continue in a difficult agriculture. But a succession of droughts seriously affected all farming. Tobacco was a major casualty. Acreage was shortly reduced to 201 acres. At that time tobacco from those fields was valued at \$125 an acre. That production was, however, practically the end of its cultivation in the area around Coffeyville.

## **N**ew efforts - and old results

In 1912 a new Burley area was opened in the Weston district of Missouri. It was, and remained, successful. Nearby Kansas farmers showed only the mildest interest in this venture of their neighbors. The better part of two decades passed before they took any active part in tobacco production.

Then, along the northeastern border of Kansas, fields of tobacco began to appear. Only 200 acres were sown to this crop by 1932. By 1939 the acreage had tripled and

489,000 pounds of Burley were harvested in that year. The total crop, however, was worth only \$73,000. The harvest of 1944 was down to 300,000 pounds but the price of tobacco had advanced in the war years and the crop brought \$144,000.

Tobacco production in Kansas during the middle 1940's was to be the last of any consequence. By the early years of the 1950's no more than a hundred acres were annually under tobacco cultivation in the state. Colonel Sharp and his friends in the south and other good farmers in the northeast had tried to make a success out of a difficult agriculture. Nature had forced the abandonment of the first efforts; economics the discontinuance of the second. The latter factor was represented by the successful operation of Burley farms in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina and elsewhere.

Long before the second revival of interest in tobacco growing had taken place, the good earth of Kansas was producing great quantities of food crops. The state which United States Senator John J. Ingalls had described as "the navel of the nation"—Fort Riley did in fact once mark the geographic center of the country—had by then become a major producer of wheat and corn, among other commodities.

## **T**he cigarette is extinguished by law

Failure to produce tobacco on a profitable commer-

cial scale in Kansas was not the only difficulty faced by the recreative plant. Kansas was long a center of anti-smoking activity.

There was nothing new about this opposition. The social uses of tobacco in Europe were still novel when they first came under attack by reformers. This antagonism had its earliest concerted expression in England early in the 1600's.

Such campaigns, thereafter, came in cycles. During a recurrence of these attacks—and one which historians have described as most intemperate—the sale or distribution of cigarettes was prohibited in Kansas. That was in 1909.

Sales of cigarettes in the United States had risen from about 2,640 million in 1900 to over 6 billion in 1909. Smokers in Kansas made it openly clear that they were unwilling to relinquish cigarettes, a general attitude in other areas where the right to use cigarettes was interfered with. Defiance of the law was widespread in Kansas. On public thoroughfares, in clubs and homes, there was daily evidence that smokers were having no particular trouble in obtaining all the cigarettes they liked.

The immediate beneficiaries of the prohibitory legislation of Kansas were dealers in the adjoining states of Colorado, Missouri and elsewhere. Bootleggers of cigarettes, who were charging 10 cents a package over the average rate in other states, were encouraging maintenance of the Kansas anti-cigarette statute.

## **P**opular demand changes the law

From 1920 on, veterans of World War I were demanding that the law which deprived them of the right to buy cigarettes in their own state be rescinded. In their drive for repeal they pointed out that they had been wartime beneficiaries of cigarettes distributed by the Young Men's Christian Association and similar organizations. The veterans had numerous supporters among the citizens of the state.

Kansas was not the only state in the Union that had acceded to the demands of the reforming element, among whom were included some noted anti-tobacco fanatics. It was, however, the last state to revoke legislation against the commerce in cigarettes.

Having accepted the inevitable, Kansas lawmakers repealed the 1909 law in 1927. A new statute permitting the sale of cigarettes placed an excise of 2 cents on each package of 20 sold within the state. Additionally, cigarette papers used by roll-your-own smokers were taxed and dealers had to pay a license fee of \$25 to \$50. A new excise stamp appeared showing the state bird, the meadow lark. This was to be applied to cigarette packages. The advertising of cigarettes was prohibited, a provision that was voided by the Kansas Supreme Court soon after its enactment.

The right to purchase cigarettes openly, and enjoy a universal custom publicly soon benefited the industrial

community of Kansas. Within two years after the anti-cigarette law was repealed there were about two dozen wholesale tobacco establishments in Kansas. Their net sales came to \$9,065,954.

## **S** smokers meet the tobacco tax

By the end of 1969 the state had collected in the range of \$242 million gross from the cigarette tax. Much of this yield was funneled into community improvements. The excise was established in 1927 and had been increased to 11 cents each package of 20 by 1970.

The state tax is not the only one imposed on cigarette smokers. They have also to pay a federal tax of 8 cents on each package. There is a federal excise on all tobacco products, a levy that brought \$2,138,000,000 to the United States Treasury in the fiscal year ending June 1969. Since 1863, when the tax on manufactured tobacco was first collected, through 1969, users of tobacco have contributed over \$48 billion to the federal revenues.

The people of the Sunflower State apparently do not miss the rich, green fields of tobacco growing in numerous other parts of America. Kansans seem now quite satisfied to leave that agricultural industry to those communities where it is well established. They are consumers of the harvests of that industry. So long as the fine tobacco products of domestic factories continue to reach them, they are content.



*East Main Street in the year Wichita was incorporated as a village, 1871.*

*Albert T. Reid collection, New York Public Library*

The Kansas State Board of Agriculture (Division of Statistics) and the Kansas Department of Revenue (Cigarette Tax Division) have supplied information incorporated in this booklet. Other data have been derived from publications of the United States Department of Agriculture and of the Tobacco Tax Council (Richmond, Virginia).

General works which provided valuable information were *Collections*, Kansas State Historical Society, various volumes; *Kansas, A Cyclopaedia of State History* (1912); and *History of Kansas*, William E. Connelley (1928).

The passage quoted on page 4 is from *Kansas Facts*, Executive Department (1927), which is also the source of Senator Ingalls' comment on page 8. The quotation on page 5 comes from *Kansas As It Is* by L. D. Burch (1878).

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